



HONEYCOMB
GROUP

Allocations & Lettings Policy

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Who's this for?	The Honeycomb Group – Staffs Housing (please see separate information for Concrete & Glow)
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1. Introduction

Our vision at Staffs Housing (SH) is to provide quality, affordable homes. We want to offer customer choice, let successful tenancies and support diverse and sustainable housing schemes and neighbourhoods.

2. Objectives

Customer empowerment:

- an easily accessible way for customers to apply to rent a home
- a system which gives customers choice about which home they want to rent
- a system customers understand and trust as fair and open

Sustainable tenancies and housing schemes:

- letting to people who fit the home, can pay the rent, will respect their neighbours and manage their tenancies well (see Better Together Policy)
- a diverse and balanced profile of customers in schemes

Sustainable business:

- letting to customers who can afford to pay the rent and property costs (with financial assessment and benefit eligibility support where needed)
- using digital technologies which are accessible and promote customer self-service.

3. Outcomes

The allocations and lettings process achieves the following outcomes which have been agreed as priorities with customers. Our customers:

- understand what options are available to them
- are satisfied with the process of finding a suitable home
- are satisfied with the quality of home they move into
- understand the costs and affordability of the homes they want to rent before a letting is agreed
- believe that our homes are let fairly
- Our schemes are sustainable - they comprise a balanced profile of customers, reflecting local communities.
- The stock is used effectively and let efficiently – this means that homes match the needs of customers and void times are minimized
- We use a digital first process, with support and a personal touch, to advertise and let its homes
- Our lettings meet housing needs and works collaboratively to support Honeycomb Charitable Services’ and also works to assist local authorities in fulfilling their statutory housing duties

4. Access to a Staffs Housing Home

There are three main access routes to rent a Staffs Housing home:

i. Direct lettings: Customers, including tenants who want to transfer, can apply for a home advertised on our website. Eligibility tests are completed before an offer is made.

ii. Local authority nominations: A proportion of properties available to rent (typically 50 per cent) are let to households selected by the Local Authority in the areas in which we operate. Each local authority will use its own method for selecting nominations to SH.

iii. Referrals: SH has agreements with some agencies or services who support clients with particular needs, and, by agreement, SH accepts a small number of referrals from these organisations (around 5% of lettings).

5. Local Lettings Plan

A local lettings plan is a scheme or area-based lettings strategy which is intended to address specific social objectives in addition to meeting housing need. We will

use local lettings plans alongside other strategies to promote sustainable housing schemes by considering the customer profile and any impact this may be having on tenancy turnover, housing management and asset management resources. Lettings plans may be introduced following a scheme sustainability assessment or in response to housing management issues.

A local lettings plan may give greater weighting to customer characteristics, other than housing need, such as the proportion of customers working or the age profile of customers to promote greater stability on schemes. For example, using targets to manage the balance of customers with support and care needs in sheltered and extra care schemes. Similarly, targets around age bands may be used on a general needs scheme to prevent a concentration of same-age customers.

6. Eligibility Criteria & Allocations

Information is made available for customers on the process to express an interest in a home available for rent. This includes explanations about any restrictions, specific requirements, and the process of applying for a home. The lettings and selection process are in Appendix A and the criteria are included in Appendix B.

Allocations are made using our advertising platform. Customers can apply for a home they want to rent. We operate a first eligible applicant approach in which the first applicant who meets the criteria for the scheme is made an offer. If the applicant does not match the criteria the next suitable applicant will be made the offer.

(For example, an applicant who does not match the advertised criteria, such as household size or minimum age requirement or there are Local Letting Plan criteria which apply, will not be made an offer).

We also recognise that some housing need circumstances, such as types of harassment and domestic abuse, require an urgent housing response. To ensure we can respond to these circumstances, some transfer applicants may be

granted priority for these reasons. This priority status is explained in more detail in Appendix C, with exclusion and suspension information shown in Appendix D.

7. Equality & Diversity

We are committed to promoting cohesive and diverse communities, providing equal opportunities for all its customers regardless of race, ethnic or national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, physical disability, age, class, appearance, marital status, or other reasons.

We will comply with all statutory requirements and best practice regarding anti-discriminatory policies and practices.

Lettings from specific diverse groups such as minority ethnic communities will be monitored to ensure that lettings are accessible to these customers.

Staff will be able to apply online on behalf of customers who are not able to complete the online application without assistance.

We will ensure it meets the communication needs of customers for example by offering interpretation services and providing information in a large print format.

8. Data protection and confidentiality

All personal data processed, stored, shared and when responding to the rights of data subjects will be carried out in accordance with current data protection legislation (UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018).

9. Access to personal information

We will comply with the Data Protection Act and all information kept by SH in relation to a customer's personal circumstances will be available for inspection by the customer on request, except for information provided in confidence by third parties. Customers have the right to correct or record their disagreement with their personal information held by SH.

10. Information Exchange

SH currently operates an information exchange protocol with other organisations such as housing authorities and the police. Officers exchanging information will only do so in accordance with established protocols.

11. Appeals

Customers who are unhappy with a letting decision can appeal and their complaint will be dealt with in accordance with the formal complaints process.

12. Tenancies offered to staff or their close relatives

SH may grant a tenancy to officers, members or employees of SH or their close relatives, or others with whom those persons are closely connected. The individual will be treated no more favourably than any other customer and approval from the Board of Management will be obtained in each case.

Where the beneficiary is a member of staff, the benefit will also be recorded in our Register of Interests.

13. Monitoring Policy

We will produce performance information about its allocations and lettings

process. This will include indicators on time taken to relet properties, customer satisfaction, and rent loss due to empty homes.

Performance will be reported quarterly to the Customer Services Committee.

This policy will be used in conjunction with:

Equality & Diversity policy

Data Protection policy

Tenancy Policy

Anti-Social Behaviour & Hate Crime Policy

Transfer/Management Transfer Procedure

Aids & Adaptations Policy

14. Review

This policy shall be reviewed every three years, and a review may be required earlier if there is a legislative or regulatory requirement or significant change.

July 2024

(Please see appendices attached)

Appendix A

Application and Selection Process

1. Direct Letting

Properties not provided to the Local Authority as part of a nominations agreement are advertised on our advertising platform.

Once a customer is interested in a property advertised it prompts them to complete an online application via the website.

Applicants from outside the North Staffordshire sub-region will be treated the same as all other applicants.

1.1 Selection

Properties advertised via the advertising platform are allocated to the first applicant meeting the criteria who registers an interest in the property.

If the applicant does not meet the household size or minimum age criteria for the scheme, or if there is a local lettings plan in place with additional criteria which are not met the applicant will not be made an offer.

Local lettings plans will consider set targets for the mix of customers attempting to create a balanced, sustainable scheme and neighbourhood. Consideration will be given to the mix of ages, gender, income, care and support needs and child density when determining the criteria.

1.1.1

The following list provides examples of criteria that may be used when advertising properties with particular characteristics (and may form part of local letting plans):

(a) Children

Due to the size/type some properties may not be suitable for children. Where there are local lettings plans there may be targets to manage child density by setting target age ranges and numbers of children.

(b) Minimum age requirement

Where a property/ scheme has been formally designated for certain age groups such as sheltered housing schemes where the minimum age is 55.

(c) Optimum family size

Will be used for all properties to prevent overcrowding or under occupation.

(d) Customers requiring support and or care

Sheltered and extra care schemes will have local lettings plans with targets set for the proportion of customers who have support and/or care needs.

(e) Customer with mobility difficulties

Adapted properties will be targeted at people who need the adaptations provided.

1.1.2 Expressing an interest in a property

Customers will be informed about how to access available homes. They will be able to express an interest in one or more of the properties.

Property information will include the following details:

- Photograph/s and address of property
- Property type, size, heating provision etc
- Total rent and service charge payable
- Letting's criteria including local lettings plan (where applicable)

A customer who meets the suitability criteria will be offered the property.

Before an offer of accommodation is made each customer will be required to complete a pre tenancy interview and to confirm the details of their application and requirements, their capacity to afford the home, agree how the rent will be paid and other aspects of the tenancy offer.

2. Transfers

Existing customer transfer requests will be addressed in the same way as new customers. Customers requesting a transfer will normally be expected to have a clear rent account and not be in breach of the terms of their tenancy and their property should be in good decorative order. In cases where a customer has a tenancy debt and is under occupying a home, a transfer may be permitted, providing arrangements to pay the rent debt have been agreed.

Priority Transfers

Transfer applicants may be awarded priority status; for example, in cases of harassment or domestic abuse (see Appendix C). In such cases the customer will be treated as a priority and may be made an offer of a property that has not been advertised.

3. Local Authority Transfers

Staffs Housing has nomination agreements with the local authorities it works with. To meet these agreements these properties will not be advertised but offered either directly to the nominee or advertised on the Local Authority's advertising platform.

Staffs Housing may reject a nomination if the nominee does not meet the agreed local lettings plan or comply with Staffs Housing lettings policy.

4. Referrals

Staffs Housing will work with specialist agencies such as Glow, Concrete and the Probation Service to assist with rehousing customers into independent accommodation following time in supported housing or an institution. Those who have been assessed as ready to move-on or where they have a support package to assist to move into independent accommodation can be referred. Properties will not be advertised where they are offered for a referral from an agency.

5. Mobility Schemes

Staffs Housing will support participation in HomeSwapper or similar tenant mobility schemes. HomeSwapper is an internet based matching scheme for tenants who want to exchange homes. Staffs Housing will direct tenants to the HomeSwapper mobility scheme and reimburse tenants for the cost of registering for the scheme.

Appendix B

Eligibility for social housing

1. Entitlement to social housing for migrants

Legislation requires housing agencies to assume responsibility for checking the immigration status of applicants when allocating social housing.

The Immigration Acts define whether a person is subject to immigration control. A person subject to immigration control requires permission to enter or remain in the UK. People who are not subject to immigration control have rights of abode or residence in the UK and as such are usually eligible for social housing. Those persons subject to immigration control are not eligible for social housing apart from specific circumstances.

All assessments of rehousing status for foreign nationals will be completed in accordance with the relevant legislation and applied fairly after a full assessment of each individual case by the officers involved and in consultation with a Neighbourhood Manager.

2. Housing Under 18s

Staffs Housing works with several specialist agencies in the provision of supported lettings for 16- and 17-year-olds. Where appropriate, single people will be referred to these agencies. Requests for general needs housing will not normally be considered, except when Staffs Housing is satisfied that appropriate support arrangements have been agreed and are in place.

Those under 18 will be offered an equitable tenancy and housing will only be offered where the local social services department, a responsible agency, or a responsible adult acceptable to Staffs Housing is willing to act as a guarantor. In these cases, 16/17-year-olds will be offered an Assured shorthold tenancy, held on trust by Staffs Housing. They will be offered an Assured tenancy when they reach the age of 18.

Appendix C

Priority cases

Staffs Housing will give priority to:

Staffs Housing tenants who have been subject to domestic abuse, racial harassment (hate crime / hate incidents), or other forms of harassment.

Transfer applicants who, after assessment by their Neighbourhood Officer, are assessed as in serious housing need. For example overcrowding, or when a tenant's health condition has changed, and they would benefit from a transfer to alternative accommodation which would assist or improve their condition or their ability to cope with their medical condition.

Transfer applicants who are under occupying a home and those who have a reduced entitlement to housing benefit /universal credit due to welfare reform size criteria.

Transfer/ Management Transfer Procedure provides detailed process.

Appendix D

Register Exclusion/Suspension Criteria

Staffs Housing is committed to creating sustainable tenancies and stable communities in its housing stock.

Staffs Housing will operate an exclusion policy which will exclude or suspend some customers from being offered a home. This will come into effect when there is evidence that the customer's behaviour has been unacceptable and serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant.

Customers excluded or suspended from being offered a home will be informed of the reason and provided with information on a right of appeal. If a customer appeals the decision a robust review will be undertaken of the original application, and if necessary, the customer may be invited for an interview.

Each case must be considered according to individual circumstances and we will not apply a blanket ban on a particular circumstance or customer characteristic.

Reasons for exclusion or suspension:

1. Non-payment of rent

Where evidence shows that a person has a history of significant non-payment of rent and where there is evidence of significant housing debt with any local authority or registered social landlord. Housing debt may include rent owed on a property or garage, or any unpaid account for example for repair or decoration work which was not considered to be reasonable wear and tear.

Once a housing debt has been cleared or when there is evidence that a payment agreement has been made and is being adhered to, a person will be able to apply for housing.

2. Anti-social behaviour/hate crime

Persons who are not considered able to conduct a tenancy without appropriate support and where this support is not available from a voluntary or statutory body such as health, probation or social services, may be rejected. All such persons will be considered for their suitability for, and the availability of, a floating tenancy support service before a decision is made.

3. Vulnerable person who needs support

Persons who are not considered able to conduct a tenancy without appropriate support and where this support is not available from a voluntary or statutory body such as health, probation or social services, may be rejected. All such persons will be considered for their

suitability for, and the availability of, a floating tenancy support service before a decision is made.

4. Criminal offence

Subject to the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, persons convicted of a criminal offence where the nature and circumstances of the crime were such that it is considered that they may not be able to properly conduct a tenancy.

A customer may be excluded where they have been convicted of one or more of the following criminal offences and if the nature and circumstance of the offence indicates a potential risk to the community or staff members.

- Murder or attempted murder
- An offence specified within Schedule 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 1997
- An offence including damage to property belonging to another person or arson
- Racially motivated or aggravated offences
- Hate crimes and hate incidents
- An offence including burglary, robbery or aggravated burglary of a dwelling.
- An offence including an assault resulting in actual bodily harm or grievous bodily harm in connection with residential premises.
- An offence contrary to protection from harassment
- An offence involving firearms
- An offence involving the misuse of drugs in connection with residential premises
- An offence, including the handling of stolen goods or property in connection with residential premises
- An offence involving domestic abuse

Evidence

The evidence required to establish that the customer has been convicted of one or more of the above offences will be from one of the following sources and subject to the Data Protection policy:

- Information supplied by the customer
- Information available within the public domain or where there are reasonable grounds to believe a criminal conviction may exist
- Information obtained from the Police for the purpose of reducing and preventing crime

Exceptions:

Spent Criminal Offence

A customer will not be excluded on the grounds of a criminal offence that is

deemed 'spent' under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

Vulnerable person with a criminal record. If a customer within the criminal offence

classification is also classified as a vulnerable person, their application will be subject to a risk assessment by a suitable expert or relevant agency.

A vulnerable adult is a person aged 18 years or over who is or may be in need of care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or maybe unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation. Whether or not a person is vulnerable in these cases will depend upon surrounding circumstances, environment and each case must be judged on its own merits.

5. Period of Exclusion/Suspension

The period of exclusion will remain in force for two years or until a comprehensive risk assessment has been undertaken and the perceived risk to the community has diminished and suitable accommodation is available. The comprehensive risk assessment will include liaison with police, probation and social services.

A customer may make subsequent applications for accommodation during the period of exclusion. Such re-registrations will be examined to determine whether the customer's circumstances have changed.

6. Decision-making

The decision to proceed with an exclusion/suspension of a customer will be taken by the Neighbourhood managers and/or Head of Customer & Neighbourhoods in consultation with other members of staff who have dealt with the initial application for re-housing.

Customers will be informed in writing of any decision regarding exclusion.

Appeals

Any customer wishing to appeal against the Staffs Housing's decision can do so in writing within 21 days of notification. This will be dealt with under Staffs Housing's formal complaints procedure.

7. Monitoring

Information relating to any exclusion will be recorded on Staffs Housing's exclusions database.